



# Cambridge Peace Commission

*A Department of the City of Cambridge, Massachusetts*

## Minutes of the Peace Commission Meeting • January 19, 2022

**Commission Members Present:** Co-Chair Elka Kuhlman, Co-Chair Larry Kim, Annie Brown, Sarah DeMott, Kaza Fraley, Yasmeen Hung, David Seeman, Bonnie Talbert

**City Staff Present:** Executive Director Brian Corr, CPD Deputy Superintendent Fred Cabral

**Call to Order:** Co-Chair Kim called the meeting to order at 6:04 p.m.

**Approval of Minutes:** On a motion from Commission Member Seeman, seconded by Commission Member Hung, the minutes of the December 22, 2021 meeting were approved unanimously by roll call vote.

### Welcome, Introductions, and Updates

- Because there were a number of newly appointed commission members, each person gave an extended introduction, including what they do professionally, where and how long they have lived in Cambridge. That was followed by an icebreaker exercise where people shared more deeply.
- The idea was shared of having the January meeting be more of a “get to know you” meeting and then have the retreat in February or March, and all agreed that would be a helpful progression.
- Commission members discussed creating a buddy system that would connect new members with members already on the commission as an additional way to help build connection and support for new members, especially while the meetings are happening remotely.

### Executive Director’s Report

- Exec. Dir. Corr offered a brief history of the Peace Commission and its focus over the years:
  - The origins of the Commission go back to the anti-nuclear weapons movement in the 1970s and 1980s, as well as efforts promoting conflict resolution and peace education in schools. It was established by City ordinance in 1983 and included the creation of the Cambridge-Yerevan, Armenia sister city relationship as a U.S.- Soviet peacemaking initiative.
  - Cambridge now has almost 20 sister cities, and there are three with active relationships: in El Salvador, Armenia and Haiti
  - The day-to-day focus is organizing events and activities which include the City’s MLK Day commemoration, its Holocaust commemoration, and Meet Your Neighbor Day, as well as vigils in response to traumatic events.
  - Peace Commission staff work with other City of Cambridge initiatives, including the Cambridge Community Resilience Network which includes representatives from the public schools, human services, police, and public health departments. The Peace Commission works in partnership with other City boards and commission, including the Citizens Committee on Civic Unity.
  - One goal of the Peace Commission is building connections between and among the diverse communities that make up Cambridge.

- Returning Commission members shared their thoughts about the work of the Commission including:
  - appreciating connecting and working with a diverse group of people;
  - finding our voice and bringing it to the community; and
  - seeing our role as bringing together people across political, ideological, cultural spectrums to have a shared community building experience.
- It was shared that the Commission can decide to have a one-year focus or a longer vision, and that that the one-year focus was helpful in the past. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, the Commission decided to focus on race and planned a series of citywide events built around screenings of the three parts of the video series “Race: The Power of an Illusion,” with facilitated discussions for learning and reflection as part of each event.
- Commission members discussed and posed informational/aspirational questions:
  - How does the Commission figure out its role and programming amidst the many, many other organizations and activities in Cambridge?
  - How can Commission members make the best use of each of their skillsets?
  - How can the Commission make Cambridge a more peaceful/better city?
  - What is the mission of the Peace Commission and what information is available about the interests and needs of the broader community?
  - What is the Commission’s “voice” and how can the Commission bring that out to the community in a way that helps bring the community together more?
- Exec. Director Brian Corr noted that:
  - There are no data that is specific to the Peace Commission, but the City does conduct annual resident surveys. The City Council has goals and the Public Health Department has a five-year community health improvement plan (CHIP) which includes goals and strategies around the social determinants of health with focuses on: healthy eating and living; community and social resilience; and .
  - There is a short “About the Cambridge Peace Commission” piece that contains information that can be described as the Peace Commission’s mission and vision and can be shared with the Commission members before the next meeting.

### **Peace Commission Retreat Planning**

- Commission members discussed the idea of a retreat to allow members to better know each other and to discuss general priorities and direction for the work of the Peace Commission members. They also discussed the challenges of what format would work best to do that remotely.
- Commission members discussed using a brainstorming approach during the retreat to freely generate ideas and then filter them and strategize later. Commission members noted the following as topics that could be considered at the retreat: Mission; Using members’ skills; community needs (and being a voice of the community); Meeting the needs of the City government

### **Welcoming New Members**

- Knowing that our meetings will continue over Zoom indefinitely, commission members discussed ways to help integrate new members.
- Commission members shared their experience in participating in a retreat when they first joined the Commission. They found it helpful in getting to know each other, in developing a better understanding of the work of the Commission, and in the brainstorming of common interests for possible future focus areas. All agreed that having a retreat would be valuable for all members of the Commission.

- The idea was shared of having the January meeting be more of a “get to know you” meeting and then have the retreat in February or March, and all agreed that would be a helpful progression.
- Commission members discussed creating a buddy system that would connect new members with members already on the commission as an additional way to help build connection and support for new members, especially while the meetings are happening remotely.

### **Adjournment**

The meeting adjourned at 7:46 PM on a motion from Commission Member DeMott, seconded by Commission Member Seeman, approved by unanimous vote.

*The next meeting of the Peace Commission is scheduled for 6:00 p.m., Wednesday, February 16, 2022 via Zoom.*